



U.S. Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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# PRESS RELEASE

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## OWNER OF OCEAN WORLD SEAFOOD LOCATED ON NORTH CLINTON AVENUE PLEADS GUILTY TO FOOD STAMP FRAUD

RE: UNITED STATES v. AERA LEE

Acting United States Attorney Kathleen M. Mehlretter announced today that Aera Lee, age 58, of Pittsford, New York, pled guilty before Hon. Michael A. Telesca, United States District Court Judge, to a felony information charging her with food stamp fraud, in violation of Title 7, United States Code, Section 2024(b), which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard A. Resnick, who is handling the case, stated that Lee was the owner of the Ocean World Seafood store located at 841 North Clinton Avenue, Rochester, New York. Lee admitted that from April 2004 through April 2005, she fraudulently acquired and possessed food stamp benefits issued by the United States Department of Agriculture. The government has determined that the amount of

food stamp benefits that Lee fraudulently acquired and possessed was more than \$1,000,000.

Food stamp benefits were issued by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture through New York State social service agencies to eligible beneficiaries. The eligible beneficiaries were required to purchase eligible food items with the food stamp benefits. Lee, however, purchased the food stamp benefits for less than their full value for cash from the beneficiaries. She did this by swiping the food stamp access device cards through the electronic funds transfer terminal installed at the store and causing more than \$1 million to flow into her designated bank account.

Lee has agreed in the plea agreement to forfeit more than \$400,000 to the government, which money had previously been seized by the government.

The conviction was the culmination of an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Anne Marie Coons, Criminal Investigation Division, and the Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Brian L. Haaser.

Sentencing for Lee is scheduled for December 5, 2005, at 9:00 a.m. in front of Judge Telesca.

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